


Texas Department of Health

The Commissioner's Report to the Board of Health

October 18, 2002

Hot Topics



Laboratory on the move

The move into the new laboratory building began the first week of October as the lab's Information Services Branch made the change. The move-in schedule is being adjusted daily based on the completion of various critical systems. All divisions of the Bureau of Laboratories are expected to be in the new building by the new year except the Organics Branch of the Environmental Sciences Division, which is awaiting completion of the seventh floor. An open house will be held soon after the first of the year. *For more information, contact Susan Neill, TDH Bureau of Laboratories, at (512) 458-7570, or e-mail susan.neill@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Border Health Summit held

Within a three-day University of Texas-Pan American Border Health Symposium beginning Oct. 10, TDH hosted the Lower Rio Grande Valley Health Summit. Lawmakers and other key, interested parties participated in well-attended sessions that focused on the long-term needs of the region. Commissioner Sanchez provided the keynote address for the symposium, the first time that a state health commissioner has addressed the event in its seven years of existence. The seven members of the new Health Services District were sworn in during the summit. *For more information, contact R.J. Dutton, Office of Border Health, at (512) 458-711, ext. 1-3737, or e-mail rj.dutton@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Public health partnership sets goals

More than 100 representatives of state and local governments, medical professions, and social, advocacy, philanthropic, environmental, and education groups gathered Oct. 1-2 in the state Capitol to identify 12 health-improvement goals for the state. The six health status goals under consideration cover areas such as healthy eating and safe physical activity, environmental hazards, infectious disease, graduation rates, immunization, and mental health. Topics related to the six goals to improve the public health system include partnerships, communications, essential public health services, workforce education, funding, and data collection. Members and interested parties can express opinions regarding goals at <http://www.tdh.state.tx.us/dpa/sshp.htm> before the next meeting, set for Oct. 30. A Declaration of Health will follow at a meeting on Dec. 4 in Austin. *For more information, contact Rick Danko, State Health Data and Policy Analysis, at (512) 458-711, ext. 1-6566, or e-mail Rick.Danko@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Disability awareness rising among TDH employees

The TDH Virtual Office on Health and Disability is offering TDH staffers this month everything from a visit by miniature horses to a panel discussion with employees to hallway exhibits, all in an effort to help staff become more aware of disabilities and how they affect us all. The Virtual Office on Health and Disability is a group whose members come from several TDH disability-related programs. It meets regularly, outside of a rigid

organizational structure, to collaborate on disability-related issues. The virtual office is designed to facilitate communication, coordination, and collaboration across TDH programs and to serve both children and adults with disabilities. The office focuses on promoting wellness among people with disabilities and preventing secondary conditions. *For more information, contact Linda Jones, Health and Disability Project, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-3131, or e-mail linda.jones@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Medical care at prisons to be reviewed

University of Texas Chancellor Mark Yudof has asked the Department of Health to play a role in assessing the quality of health care for prison inmates in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice system. TDH has been asked to select three members, including two physicians, to review inmate complaints about medical care, offer recommendations to address deficiencies, and provide written reports. *For more information, contact Rocco Pelosi at (512) 478-7375, or e-mail rocco.pelosi@tdh.state.tx.us.*



HIV funding decisions change

The Texas Department of Health has changed the competitive process for federal funding for HIV prevention programs this year to help ensure that the most effective programs get the money. Changes were made to reflect the changes in at-risk populations and where they are more likely to be found. In recent years, studies have shown that African-American men and women are at a disproportionately greater risk for HIV infection. At-risk populations are also younger and more concentrated in urban areas. TDH is attempting to get the most for its federal dollars by funding intervention programs that service the target population and are theoretically most effective. Agencies, in submitting their applications for funding this year, were asked to service the highest-risk populations. Of the 57 HIV prevention programs currently receiving federal funding, 19 will not be funded next year. The TDH Bureau of HIV and STD Prevention receives \$9.5 million from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention each year to be distributed among local agencies for HIV prevention programs. The CDC allocates a total of \$320 million for HIV prevention programs administered by health departments in all states and six major cities, including Houston. Local agencies within the states then compete for funding. *For more information, contact Celine Hanson, Bureau of HIV and STD Prevention, at (512) 490-2505, or e-mail celine.hanson@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Pertussis cases up; education aimed at schools, parents, physicians

As of Oct. 1, Texas has had 789 pertussis cases, including four infant deaths in 2002. This is the highest number of cases reported in any year since 1968, when 802 cases occurred. Last year, a total of 615 cases of pertussis, also called whooping cough, were reported in the state. The Texas Education Agency and TDH responded to recent pertussis outbreaks in schools by asking school officials to inform parents about pertussis. The resulting parental notice emphasized the importance of vaccinating children, especially infants, against this disease and urged cooperation with local health officials handling the outbreaks. Earlier this year, TDH sent pertussis alerts to the Texas Medical Association, the Texas Academy of Family Physicians, and other professional organizations. *For more information, contact David Bastis, (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6435, or e-mail to david.bastis@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Update on West Nile virus

As of Oct. 17, a total of 107 human cases of West Nile illness have been reported. The virus has identified in 143 counties in Texas. Six West Nile human fatalities in Texas have been reported, with the latest this week in Randall County. TDH epidemiologists are

following the course of the virus as it moves through the Texas plains and are watching the bird migration southward toward the Rio Grande Valley for potential new cases. The toll-free West Nile Information Line at 1-888-883-9997 has recorded anywhere from 143 calls in a week to almost 700. Up-to-date, in-depth information on the West Nile virus is available at www.texaswestnile.org. For more information, contact Joe Garrett, Zoonosis Control Division, at (512) 458-7255, or e-mail joe.garrett@tdh.state.tx.us.



Recommendations for flu shots extended to young children

Flu season generally runs from October through March. People at highest risk for complications from influenza—those older than 65, people with chronic conditions, those with compromised immune systems, and pregnant women—should be vaccinated first. In addition, this year the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control are encouraging parents to have children ages 6 months to 23 months immunized against influenza to prevent complications and hospitalizations. TDH does not anticipate any delays in receiving vaccine this year and by Oct. 10 had already received 62.5 percent of its order of vaccine. For more information, contact Jan Pelosi, Immunization Division, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6423, or e-mail jan.pelosi@tdh.state.tx.us.



Quick response determines suspected smallpox case to be chicken pox

On Sept. 24, two Corpus Christi physicians notified the Office of the State Epidemiologist of a hospitalized patient with a serious pustular rash covering most of her face and spreading towards her trunk. The cause of her rash was unknown. Some but not all signs and symptoms were consistent with smallpox, and TDH activated an immediate response. Confirming the diagnosis and isolating the patient were the most critical activities. Staff from the TDH Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division led a conference call within 20 minutes of the initial call that included the two physicians, TDH Public Health Region 11 staff, Corpus-Christi Nueces County Health Department staff, the hospital's infection-control officer, and the Office of the State Epidemiologist. The patient was put into isolation at the hospital. Samples from the patient were collected, transported by county health department staff, and received by TDH laboratory personnel by 11 p.m. that night. Electron microscopy determined a herpes virus, not a pox virus; by 9 a.m. the following day, serological testing confirmed severe chicken pox. This occurrence provided an excellent exercise in smallpox response and highlights the importance of physicians working with public health. For more information, contact Dennis Perrotta, Office of the State Epidemiologist, at (512) 458-7219, or e-mail dennis.perrotta@tdh.state.tx.us.



Perchlorate found in public water wells

Public water wells in Ector, Midland, Gaines, Glasscock, Howard, Martin, and Dawson counties contain perchlorate, a chemical that can cause thyroid dysfunction. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality has asked TDH to notify area health-care providers about this situation. The Health Alert Network system will send information to local health departments and the TDH regional office about the potential public health concerns associated with the presence of perchlorate in drinking water. For more information, contact John Villanacci at (512) 458-7269, or e-mail john.villanacci@tdh.state.tx.us.



CDC awards TDH \$900,000 to seek causes of birth defects

TDH's Birth Defects Research Center will receive \$900,000 this year in the first installment of a five-year cooperative agreement with the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to enhance state research on birth defects. TDH is one of eight

centers in the United States that collects information to help identify causes of birth defects, which are a leading cause of infant death and a significant contributor to serious illness and life-long disability. Understanding causes may help prevent these effects. *For more information, contact Amy Case, Birth Defects Monitoring Division, at (512) 458-7232, or e-mail amy.case@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Best practices identified for efficiency, effectiveness

The Fiscal and Administrative Improvement Response (FAIR) teams have identified the gaps between current TDH practices and best practices, outlined policies, and proposed multiple organizational structures to facilitate implementation of best practices at TDH. To determine best practices, the teams visited other agencies, brought in other agencies' staff to join TDH staff in focus groups, and utilized resources on the web as well as written materials. Executive sponsors are reviewing the proposed organization structures while the teams ensure that the best practices address known inefficiencies or weaknesses and represent strategic partnership of fiscal, administrative, and program resources at central headquarters, hospitals, and regions. The fiscal teams are also reviewing the best practices identified in the individual teams to ensure that, when integrated, they provide for efficient and effective policies, processes, and procedures. *For more information, contact Machele Pharr at (512) 458-7640, or e-mail machele.pharr@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Wreath ceremony held for Breast Cancer Awareness Month

The Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program cosponsored the sixth annual Wreath Ceremony on Oct. 1 on the south steps of the state Capitol. Other sponsors were the American Cancer Society, the Governor's Commission for Women, the Texas Cancer Council, and the Susan G. Komen Foundation. TDH Executive Deputy Commissioner Charles Bell opened the ceremony with a brief talk about the significance of breast cancer awareness. Texas First Lady Anita Perry spoke on the importance of early detection in surviving breast cancer. Six breast cancer survivors gave brief but powerful testimonials on how the cancer has affected their lives. The wreath will remain on display at the Capitol throughout October. A reception for breast cancer survivors was held after the ceremony in the lieutenant governor's reception room in the Capitol. *For more information, contact Rosamaria Murillo, Bureau of Women's Health, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6471, or e-mail rosamaria.murillo@tdh.state.tx.us.*



School Health Program encourages better nutrition

The School Health Program is working with the Cardiovascular Health and Wellness Program, the American Heart Association, and the University of Texas School of Public Health on a conference to assist schools with the establishment and implementation of components required in Senate Bill 19 of the 77th Legislature, including a school health advisory committee, a coordinated school health program, and increased physical activity requirements for students. The conference will be held Nov. 13. In other news, School Health Program staff were invited to join a Texas team attending the Healthy Schools Summit in Washington, D.C., on Oct. 7 and 8. This event, funded by Darimax, an affiliate of the American Dairy Association, brought together the nation's leading education, children's health, and nutrition organizations in a groundbreaking effort to help improve children's health and educational performance through better nutrition and increased physical activity in schools. The Texas team includes representatives from public and private agencies who returned with an action plan to expand the team and replicate the Healthy Schools Summit in Texas. *For more information, contact Mary Jackson, Child Wellness Division, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-2903, or e-mail mary.jackson@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Statewide smallpox immunization plan being developed

The Office of the State Epidemiologist is coordinating the TDH effort to develop plans to immunize our population against smallpox in the event of a bioterrorism attack. This plan, due to the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention by Dec. 1, will include approaches developed by our local health departments and TDH regions.

This week, the national Advisory Committee on Immunizations Practices advised the CDC to move towards immunizing selected health-care workers in the very near future as a defense against the spread of smallpox if the virus is reintroduced into the essentially susceptible U.S. population (TDH's Celine Hanson is a member of this important national committee). The final national plan for smallpox immunization remains on the desk of President Bush for his approval; the details are not known and may likely change.

Complex issues surround the use of the smallpox vaccine in the absence of a real case of smallpox. Many center on the sometimes significant side effects of the vaccine. When the vaccine was last used, we did not have HIV/AIDS, we had fewer transplantation patients, and the use of immunosuppressing drugs was much less than it is now. These and other issues make smallpox vaccination and response a very complicated field of work.

For more information, contact Dennis Perrotta, Office of the State Epidemiologist, at (512) 458-7219, or e-mail dennis.perrotta@tdh.state.tx.us.



Statewide initiative tests, counsels, trains, and publicizes hepatitis C epidemic

In the nation's first statewide effort to address hepatitis C in a comprehensive and integrated manner, TDH established the Hepatitis C Initiative in 1998 to raise awareness about this epidemic (the hepatitis C virus now infects about 300,000 Texans), identify persons most at risk, educate health-care workers about the value of early detection, and provide counseling and testing services. The initiative is composed of five ongoing components: conducting seroprevalence studies, providing counseling and testing statewide at existing publicly funded HIV counseling and testing sites, training counselors, training and educating physicians and other health-care professionals, and conducting public awareness and education activities. The Hepatitis C State Workgroup, which helps guide the activities of the initiative, has also been in operation since 1998. It began with 20 members and now includes more than 90 members representing various organizations and stakeholder groups. Reporting and surveillance activities are also conducted year-round.

For more information, contact Alma Thompson, Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6364, or e-mail alma.thompson@tdh.state.tx.us.



Plan under way to recover from disasters and continue business

The impact of natural disasters, accidents, and man-made catastrophes can be softened if we employ corrective action by developing a detailed plan specifying the steps to take to overcome a significant disruptive event and get our business "back to normal," and if we employ preventive action by identifying the most likely and significant risks and take steps *now* to lessen and mitigate them. A formal Business Continuity Plan (BCP) is an indispensable tool in achieving these goals. Part of the BCP is a document called the *Disaster Recovery Plan*, which focuses largely on bringing our information resources back online. Key elements of a BCP include a risk assessment, backup and recovery strategies, the *Disaster Recovery Plan* itself and a method for testing it, training employees on their role in the recovery process, and a commitment to maintain the BCP and keep it up-to-date.

A TDH team has already started work on developing the framework of our BCP. By December, we should have a plan that focuses on business recovery at our Central Campus here in Austin. This plan will deal with infrastructure, facilities, information-technology resources, and our HHSAS system. In the year to come, we will build upon this plan by adding recovery strategies for all of our programs, regions and hospitals. For more information, contact John Burlinson, Bureau of Resource Management, at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-2762, or Jake Nicholson at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6031, or e-mail john.burlinson@tdh.state.tx.us.

Disease Outbreaks / Investigations / Recalls



Food-borne illness strikes hospital

A hospital in Region 1 was recently hit by an outbreak of food-borne illness. After an employee appreciation luncheon held at the hospital, 35 of the 51 attendees became ill. Staff members from Region 1's epidemiology program investigated the outbreak and interviewed 27 people. It was unclear what caused the outbreak, though salmonella or staph are among the suspected infections. Data demonstrated that the salad was most likely one of the sources of infection. For more information, contact Barry Wilson at (806) 767-0496, or e-mail barry.wilson@tdh.state.tx.us.



Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* hits football teams

The Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance (IDEAS) staff are assisting in the investigation and control of outbreaks of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* skin infections in 20 members of high school football teams in Regions 4/5N and 6. TDH is investigating the possibility that transmission may have occurred among teams during a football game. IDEAS personnel are being contacted more frequently regarding methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* infections and outbreaks in settings where close contact occurs. For more information, contact Neil Pascoe, Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676, or e-mail neil.pascoe@tdh.state.tx.us.



Fundraiser ends with food-borne or water-borne outbreak

Region 6/5S epidemiologists were notified on Sept. 23 that a group of people who had attended a fashion show and luncheon at a fundraiser event on Sept. 19 had become ill with symptoms of gastroenteritis. The number of ill persons has not been verified, but some reports indicate it could be 80 ill persons out of 300 attendees. Primary symptoms were nausea, abdominal cramps, fever, and diarrhea. Sanitarians investigated the kitchen that prepared the food items but did not find any violations. Laboratory testing of stool specimens is being conducted. No additional cases have been reported, and all of the ill persons have reportedly recovered. Region 6/5S epidemiologists are conducting the investigation with the assistance of IDEAS staff. For more information, contact Linda Gaul, Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676, or e-mail linda.gaul@tdh.state.tx.us.



Probable pertussis in midwife spurs action

A probable case of pertussis in a midwife was reported by a physician's office in Region 6. The patient was seen on Sept. 18 with a seven-week history of dry non-productive cough that was paroxysmal with some post-tussive vomiting; the IgM and IgG were reactive, and the IgA was non-reactive. The patient's husband has had a cough for a week, and her daughter has slight cold symptoms; test results are pending. The patient had delivered eight infants in the past eight weeks and worked with many pregnant women. Other exposures are possible as she attends college classes, and her husband is a

teacher and counselor. The physician's office has treated and prophylaxed the family and advised symptomatic family members to stay home for five days of antibiotic treatment.

There has been a coordinated public-health response to this case from the Houston, Harris County, and Montgomery County health departments, Region 6, and the central office. Prophylaxis has been recommended for infants or other high-risk persons exposed within the past six weeks. All clients seen by the midwife since June, as well as her fellow students, will be notified of a possible exposure to pertussis. The physician's office will also distribute pertussis fact sheets to office staff and patients who were exposed in the waiting room. Recommendations included prophylaxis of all close contacts of the husband's during the last week. A general pertussis alert letter was sent to Harris County through the Harris County Medical Society. Local health departments are also notifying ICPs and additional physicians within their jurisdictions. The TDH central office is working with midwife associations to draft a pertussis alert in both English and Spanish for immediate distribution. *For more information, contact Laura Tabony or David Bastis, Immunization Division, at (512) 458-7284, ext. 1-6001, or e-mail laura.tabony@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Upcoming Conferences



Texas EMS Conference 2002

The annual Texas EMS Conference, scheduled for Nov. 25-27 at the Austin Convention Center, will include almost 140 different EMS continuing education classes. Approximately 3,000 registrants, presenters, vendors, volunteer workers, and staff are expected to participate, making it one of the largest conferences in Austin and probably the largest EMS conference in the nation. The Governor's EMS and Trauma Advisory Council will meet Nov. 24 at 5 p.m. at the Hyatt Hotel; the standing committees and task forces will meet Nov. 23 and 24. *For more information, contact Kelly Harrell, Bureau of Emergency Management, at (512) 834-6700, or e-mail kelly.harrell@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Minority Health Conference

The ninth annual Minority Health Conference will be held Nov. 7-9 at the Harvey Hotel-DFW Airport in Irving. Entitled "Healthy Texans 2010: Effective Approaches for Solving Health Challenges in Minority and Under-Served Population," the conference will have a primary focus on cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes. Secondary focus areas include mental health, education and community-based programs, environmental health, and alternative and complimentary medicine. The conference is co-sponsored by TDH and the City of Irving. *For more information, contact Eva Holguin, Office of Minority Health, at (512) 458-7629, e-mail eva.holguin@tdh.state.tx.us, or visit www.ci.irving.tx.us/healthtx.*



Immunize Texasize 2002 Conference

Immunize Texasize 2002, the fourth annual statewide immunization conference, is set for Nov. 18-21 in Austin. Break-out sessions and skills classes will address topics such as vaccines, disease trends, the Texas Vaccines for Children Program, bioterrorism, coalition building, and skills in vaccine management. Featured speakers include Brian O'Malley, an adventurer and author; Dr. Paul Offit, chief of Infectious Disease at the Children's Hospital in Philadelphia; and the real Doc Hollywood, Dr. Neil Shulman, from Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta. Participants include physicians, nurses, and other health-care providers. TDH Immunization Division staff members are expecting a full conference with numerous speakers, new ideas, and renewed efforts to

raise vaccination coverage levels for all Texans. *For more information, contact Ryan Davis, TDH Immunization Division, at (512) 458-7284, e-mail ryan.davis@tdh.state.tx.us, or visit www.ImmunizeTexas.com.*

Training and Workshops



Training conducted for regional public health preparedness teams

In September, a training session was held in Austin for the regional public health preparedness teams across the state. The course was developed by staff in the Office of the State Epidemiologist, Division of Emergency Preparedness, and Region 2/3. Curriculum included training on incident command, emergency management planning, facilitation, systems development, emotional intelligence, and briefings on the State Emergency Management Plan. Attendance was excellent, with more than 50 participants for five days. *For more information, contact Francesca Kupper, Office of the State Epidemiologist, at (512) 458-7772, or e-mail francesca.kupper@tdh.state.tx.us.*



37th Advanced Animal Control Officer Training Course

Region 2/3's Zoonosis Control Program's 37th Advanced Animal Control Officer Training Course was conducted in September at the Arlington headquarters. Each of the officers in attendance passed the written and practical tests. *For more information, contact Jan Buck, at (817) 264-4920 or e-mail jan.buck@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Public Health Preparedness

Region 6/5S Public Health Preparedness and Epidemiology Response Team (ERT) members attended a two and a half-day Incident Command System (ICS) with Integrated Tabletop Exercise training in Houston presented by the Texas Engineering Extension Service. Regional staff worked closely with members of the Houston Police Department, Houston Fire Department, Red Cross, Houston Airport System, and Houston Health and Human Services to learn how the ICS management system can be used to command personnel during a disaster. The Public Health Preparedness staff was also placed on elevated alert in preparation for Tropical Storm Fay, Tropical Storm Isidore, and Hurricane Lilli. The region kept local governmental contacts and the TDH representative at the State Emergency Operation Center informed of regional activities. *For more information, contact Barbara Key at (713) 767-3003, or e-mail barbara.key@tdh.state.tx.us.*



TB Program Managers Meeting

People who manage TB programs in Texas are meeting Oct. 15-16 in Austin for a combination business meeting and training session. *For more information, contact Charles Wallace, TB Elimination Division, at (512) 458-7447, or e-mail charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Bioterrorism Educational Program

The second Basic Epidemiology Workshop, held Sept 26-27 in Arlington, was attended by about 30 regional and local public health nurses and epidemiologists. The Basic Epidemiology Software Course to be taught the first week in November will consist of two separate courses: one for the Epidemiology Response Teams (ERTs) and the other for central office staff who need training. Plans have begun on the Field Epidemiology Course for the ERTs teams; it will consist of a five-week distance learning course and will provide training necessary for the teams to begin to participate in such field studies

as the Meningococcal Meningitis Project. A request for a Scope of Work Proposal to teach both an Infectious Disease Workshop and a Surveillance Course to regional health professionals was sent to all of the regional campuses of the Schools of Public Health around the state. *For more information, contact Kathleen Shupe-Ricksecker, Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676, or e-mail kathleen.shupe-ricksecker@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Bridging Theory and Practice

HIV/STD Health Resources Division staff conducted Bridging Theory and Practice, a two-day course, July 22-23 in Houston. The course puts a new emphasis on behavioral interventions, covering basic behavioral science theories and how the theories can be translated and adapted into interventions to address the needs of the community. This training provides an opportunity to build a common language and understanding of the various interventions. *For more information, contact Jay Todd, HIV/STD Training and Public Education Branch, at (512) 490-2535, or e-mail jay.todd@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Systems Thinking/Systems Changing

HIV/STD Health Resources Division staff presented Systems Thinking/Systems Changing on July 24 in Houston to Harris County Health Department HIV prevention staff. Systems Thinking/Systems Changing is a hands-on simulation that provides training and experience in planning for and managing continuous change and improvement in a community. The simulation is based on systems thinking – a way of looking at wholes and considering the whole system – and models for understanding how individuals change. The key purposes of Systems Thinking/Systems Changing are to learn and try out principles of organizational change in a safe, low-risk environment; build awareness of change principles based on latest research and literature; and practice working as a team to promote continuous improvement in a community. *For more information, contact Jay Todd, HIV/STD Training and Public Education Branch, at (512) 490-2535, or e-mail jay.todd@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Grants



Texas Comprehensive Women's Health Initiative Grant

The Bureau of Women's Health has received Maternal and Child Health Set-Aside Program funds from the Health Resources and Services Administration to develop the Texas Comprehensive Women's Health Initiative. The project will first establish an internal women's health work group in TDH to develop a strategic approach to women's health issues. Then the project will facilitate the development of comprehensive women's health systems in two public health regions. The grant will provide \$100,000 per year for three years starting Sept. 30. *For more information, contact Chan McDermott, Bureau of Women's Health, at (512) 458-7796, or e-mail chan.mcdermott@tdh.state.tx.us.*



USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service Grant

The Retail Foods Division and Manufactured Foods Division of the Bureau of Food and Drug Safety obtained a two-year \$35,000 grant from the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service to help fund travel for 30 local sanitarians from 30 Texas local health departments to the Sept. 11-12 Food Safety and Security Symposium in Arlington, as well as another \$10,000 two-year grant from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to

help cover the costs of the symposium's speakers. The State Food Safety Task Force was established three years ago to promote uniformity in food regulation, education, and communication among federal, state, and local officials, regulated industry, academia, and consumer advocates. *For more information contact Dan Sowards, Manufactured Foods Division, at (512) 719-0243, or e-mail dan.sowards@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Animal-Friendly fund gets \$250,000

The first Animal-Friendly grants have been awarded and the contracts have been developed. Twelve organizations were awarded funds, with amounts ranging from \$10,000 to \$25,000. The total funding was \$250,000. *For more information, contact Debbie Speicher, Zoonosis Control Division, at (512) 458-7255, or e-mail debbie.speicher@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Program Updates



Texas Health Steps develops adolescent-care module

With funding provided by Texas Health Steps, a comprehensive module on the many aspects of adolescent health was developed to assist health-care practitioners with information, tips, and suggestions that may be helpful in providing care to adolescents. The material is available via the THSteps Education Center website at <http://www.thsteps.org>. The training provides credits in continuing nursing education and continuing medical education. *For more information, contact Florastine Mack, Texas Health Steps Division, at (512) 458-7700, ext. 1-2021, or e-mail florastine.mack@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Exchange Building lease under discussion

TDH asked the Texas Building and Procurement Commission (TBPC) on July 8 to help bring the Austin Exchange Building lease into compliance with the lease contract. Deficiencies include high humidity levels in many areas of the building and inadequate response time by the lessor for both routine and emergency maintenance calls. On Sept. 11, TDH met with TBPC and officials from the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services, and the Department of Human Services to discuss the Exchange Building and other Austin leases. TBPC is willing to proceed with default proceedings if the lessor fails to comply with the terms and conditions of the lease contract. However, it was decided to explore and identify a replacement facility and to identify all costs associated with a move before making any formal declaration of default. TBPC has agreed to take on the responsibility of locating and negotiating a suitable replacement lease facility for TDH, if needed, and wants to consolidate several HHS agencies in the process. *For more information, contact John Burlinson, Bureau of Resource Management, at (512) 458-7738, or e-mail john.burlinson@tdh.state.tx.us.*



TDH first state agency to complete FY 2003 conversion

At the end of each fiscal year, state agencies convert financial and human-resource data. This year, TDH staff moved up the fiscal year-end conversion deadlines in order to assist the Health and Human Services Administrative System (HHSAS) Human Resource Management System (HRMS) project with critical parallel-testing timelines with the Comptroller of Public Accounts, which notified TDH that we were the first state agency to complete its FY 2003 conversion. The work involved many employees, including those in Information Systems, Financial Services, Budget, Human Resources, and the HHSAS HRMS Project Team. TDH managers were also responsible for ensuring that this critical milestone was achieved as they supported and followed instructions on

deadlines for August personnel actions and new hires. This accomplishment is an example of a true TDH team effort. *For more information, contact Sharon Brewer at (512) 458-7456, or e-mail sharon.brewer@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Staffing reductions planned in Human Resources

The Human Resources Fiscal and Administrative Improvement Response team, called the HR FAIR team, has been charged with developing a staffing plan that would reduce HR to a staff of 60 by September 2002. It is necessary that central office HR be staffed at no more than 40 positions by then, including five now working on the HR PeopleSoft Project. By September 2003, HR staff must be reduced to a total of 51, which will require a reduction in job classifications, awards, benefits, and bureau administration. A reduction in staffing at some of the regional and health facility centers is recommended. Each region would consist of two staffers, one an HR Specialist IV and the other an HR Specialist I. TCID has reduced to one HR Specialist II, and it is recommended that STHCC be reduced to the same staffing level as the regions. Staffing levels should be met by December 2002. Efforts will be made to ease the transition for staff whose position may have greater or fewer responsibilities. *For more information, contact Ernie Klatt, Bureau of Human Resources, at (512) 458-7302, or e-mail ernie.klatt@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Changes in sight due to consolidation of administrative services

House Bill 2641 of the 76th Legislature assigned responsibility to the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to establish an effective and efficient system for delivery of administrative support services to HHS agencies. Through this bill, HHSC was given clear authority to direct and manage all administrative functions of the agencies within the HHS enterprise. One of the primary objectives of HB 2641 was to create a single system for delivering administrative support services to the multiple HHS agencies. TDH was given the lead for reviewing Human Resource management. Although consolidation of the HR function has been delayed, the impact has been dramatic. Many HR staff decided to transfer into other positions within TDH instead of taking a chance that their jobs may be lost. Some HR services need to be shifted to program managers. Necessary changes to HR policies and procedures have been delayed. An HR project manager will be hired by HHSC as the central HR authority to review and set HR policies and procedures common to the entire HHS enterprise and to manage the continuing development of a new HR service-delivery model. It's possible that this position could include management of HR functions, when consolidated. *For more information, contact Ernie Klatt, Bureau of Human Resources, at (512) 458-7302, or e-mail ernie.klatt@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Standards approved by Information Resources Steering Committee

The Deputy Commissioner for Administration and the Information Resource Manager (IRM) have provided leadership in the establishment of the Information Resources Steering Committee (IRSC). Strong information-technology governance is key to sound systems management. Under the direction of the Information Resource Manager, Associateship for Information Systems staff recently developed a proposed model and process for the IRSC to evaluate and prioritize proposed information-technology projects using business case analyses. This model is being submitted to the IRSC for approval this month. In addition, the IRSC has approved the following standards: IT Procurement, Project Management, Software Development Life Cycle (SDLC), and Documentation. *For more information, contact Tom Thornton, Associateship for Information Systems, at (512) 458-7271, or e-mail tom.thornton@tdh.state.tx.us.*



TDH selected to host Citrix for Health and Human Services Commission

At the Sept. 4 meeting of the HHSC Information Resource managers, TDH was selected to develop an enterprise approach to expansion of the existing Health and Human Services Administrative System (HHSAS) Citrix solution to serve as a centralized host for other HHS agencies. TDH will develop an approach including a draft of service-level expectations, estimates required for technical expansion, and needs assessments of HHS agencies. *For more information, contact Tom Thornton, Associateship for Information Systems, at (512) 458-7271, or e-mail tom.thornton@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Health Alert Network being rolled out

The Regional and Satellite Network Connectivity Project is on target for completion by Oct. 17. Regions 6/5S and 11 are complete. The Health Alert Network (HAN) Public Health Preparedness Grant funded network connectivity for all TDH facilities to join the Health and Human Services Consolidated Network. The project rollout began in August. At project completion, the HAN will cover 81 additional counties and their citizen populations. In addition, increased network security will be extended to all TDH regional offices. *For more information, contact Tom Thornton, Associateship for Information Systems, at (512) 458-7271, or e-mail tom.thornton@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Medicaid transferred to Health and Human Services Commission

The transition of the Health Care Financing Medicaid Program from TDH to the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) was completed Aug. 31. During fiscal year 2002, TDH provided certain administrative and accounting services through a contractual arrangement with HHSC while HHSC built its systems and organizational infrastructure to accommodate Medicaid needs. Program management and oversight responsibilities were transferred to HHSC last Sept. 1 to comply with actions mandated by the 77th Legislature. *For more information, contact Sharon Brewer at (512) 458-7456, or e-mail sharon.brewer@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Health Information Portability and Accountability Act compliance progressing

On Sept. 8, TDH Internal Audit published a favorable audit report on the Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) project, with the single recommendation that TDH continue to put forth at least the same effort currently being shown. TDH's progress toward achieving HIPAA compliance is due to the commitment and collaboration of many staffers across the agency as well as in the HHSC enterprise. *For more information, contact Judy Sandberg at (512) 458-7111, ext. 1-6262, or e-mail judy.sandberg@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Sexually violent predators get civil commitment

The Council on Sex Offender Treatment, charged in January 2000 with the civil commitment of sexually violent predators, has committed 21 sexually violent predators as of Oct. 2. Services include psychological testing, monitoring using global-positioning-satellite (GPS) technology, case management, and supervised housing, all provided on a contractual basis. For fiscal year 2002, the contracted services totaled \$71,889.94. *For more information, contact Janet Lathem, Council on Sex Offender Treatment Providers, at (512) 834-6628 or e-mail janet.lathem@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Suspicious pipes found non-radioactive

An Austin pedestrian found three liquid-filled PVC pipes marked "Caution: Rradiation" in a parking lot near a construction site on the evening of Sept. 8. Austin police and the Austin Fire Department's HazMat team responded, and the story was featured on the

local TV news that night. The TDH Bureau of Radiation Control was contacted through its 24-hour emergency system and worked with the other responders to investigate any potential hazard. Radiation surveys of the pipes at the scene found no elevated readings, but TDH took possession of the pipes as a precaution. Because of the proximity of the Sept. 11 anniversary and to provide a training exercise, tests were performed to rule out the possibility of a terrorist incident. The police department's bomb squad examined the contents of the tubes, found nothing noteworthy, and transported them to the fire department's training grounds, where the tubes were opened remotely and the liquid inside tested by robots; the tubes contained only water and were disposed of. Police continue to investigate the incident for any criminal intent. *For more information, contact Art Tate, Bureau of Radiation Control, at (512) 834-6688, or e-mail arthur.tate@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Texas Food Safety Task Force holds symposium

The Texas Food Safety Task Force, composed of TDH staff, industry groups from wholesale to retail, the Consumer's Union, academia, and representatives from four local health departments around the state, held a two-day Food Safety and Security Symposium in Arlington in September. The task force is co-chaired by the TDH division directors from Manufactured Foods and Retail Foods. More than 150 attendees heard speakers from the National Food Processors Association, the Food Marketing Institute, FDA, USDA, Texas A&M, and TDH, as well as representatives of food irradiation and high-pressure pasteurization. Not a single negative comment was received on the 90-plus evaluation forms returned. Attendees learned what Texas is doing about food security, what industry is doing nationally, what our federal regulatory counterparts are doing, and what remains to be done. They also learned about "pulsed field gel electrophoresis" and how this technology helps identify and limit the scope of food-borne illness outbreaks. *For more information contact Dan Sowards, Manufactured Foods Division, at (512) 719-0243, or e-mail dan.sowards@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Non-compliant Leon County food establishment gets one-year probation

The Bureau of Food and Drug Safety's Retail Foods Division and Licensing and Enforcement Division successfully closed a food establishment in Leon County after a severe rodent infestation and other serious sanitation problems were discovered. After the business refused to voluntarily close, an emergency closure order, signed by Executive Deputy Commissioner Charles Bell, was issued, requiring closure until corrective actions were taken. The establishment violated the order and sued TDH and one of the retail food inspectors, at which time the Office of the Attorney General was requested to defend TDH and the inspector. After numerous compliance meetings, the establishment agreed to a final judgment and permanent injunction. It was assessed a monetary penalty, required to perform several corrective actions and to compensate TDH for inspection costs, and placed on a one-year probation. The Bureau of Food and Drug Safety is almost always able to obtain voluntary compliance, but in cases such as this resorts to legal remedies to address chronic violators who present imminent health hazards to the public. *For more information, contact Steve McAndrew, Retail Foods Division, at (512) 719-0232, or e-mail steve.mcandrew@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Public-service announcements on hepatitis C attract out-of-staters

The National Hepatitis C Institute in the state of Washington has asked TDH for permission to use its hepatitis C public-service announcements targeting minority populations. *For more information, contact Gary Heseltine, Infectious Disease Epidemiology and Surveillance Division, at (512) 458-7676 or e-mail gary.heseltine@tdh.state.tx.us.*



TB expert visits Texas

During the week of Aug. 26-30, Dr. Lee Reichman visited several sites in Texas to raise awareness of tuberculosis. He spoke at the Dallas County Department of Health and Human Services on Aug. 26, signed copies of his book *Timebomb* at a bookstore in Dallas on Aug. 27, recorded a radio interview and attended a reception at the American Lung Association of Texas in Austin on Aug. 28, spoke at the groundbreaking ceremony at the Texas Center for Infectious Disease in San Antonio on Aug. 29, and met with the editorial board of the *Dallas Morning News* and attended a reception in a private home in Dallas on Aug. 30. His trip was arranged by RESULTS International, a volunteer advocacy organization that has taken on the cause of bringing attention to TB. *For more information, contact Charles Wallace, TB Elimination Division, at (512) 458-7447, or e-mail charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Southwest TB Controllers Association meets to discuss TB prevention

Staff members of the TB Elimination Division attended a meeting of the Southwest TB Controllers Association Aug. 22-23 in Dallas at the offices of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Region VI. Participants discussed activities and strategies for the prevention and control of tuberculosis in Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and Utah. *For more information, contact Charles Wallace, TB Elimination Division, at (512) 458-7447, or e-mail charles.wallace@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Raising awareness topic at Texas TB Coalition meeting

On July 26, members of the Texas TB Coalition met in Austin at the offices of the American Lung Association of Texas to discuss strategies to raise the awareness of TB prevention and control. *For more information, contact Ann Tyree, TB Elimination Division, at (512) 458-7447, or e-mail ann.tyree@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Embryology training materials in development

The Birth Defects Monitoring Division recently co-sponsored a video teleconference with the national office of the March of Dimes. This initiative focused on a series of embryology lectures by Tom Sadler of the University of North Carolina geared to surveillance staff. The audience consisted of selected staff from the Birth Defects Monitoring Division and the state of Arkansas. These presentations will be reproduced on video and made available at no cost to staff in Texas and in all states with birth defects surveillance programs. *For more information, contact Amy Case, Birth Defects Monitoring Division, at (512) 458-7232, or e-mail amy.case@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission given TDH data on fetal alcohol syndrome

Two staffers at the TDH Birth Defects Monitoring Division conducted a literature search on the effectiveness of point-of-sale warnings about fetal alcohol syndrome in establishments that sell liquor. The information was synthesized and made available to the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission (TABC). Both staffers are serving on a TABC task force that is planning a press conference with Texas Gov. Rick Perry this month relating to a campaign that includes voluntary point-of-sale warnings. *For more information, contact Mary Ethen, Birth Defects Monitoring Division, at (512) 458 7232, or e-mail mary.ethen@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Data to help American Cancer Society reduce cancer burden

The TDH Cancer Registry Division recently contributed data to the American Cancer Society for publication of *Texas Cancer Facts and Figures 2002-2003: A Sourcebook for Planning and Implementing Programs for Cancer Prevention and Control*. Additional TDH data for the book was provided by the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, the Office of Health Information and Analysis, and the Bureau of Chronic Disease and Tobacco Prevention. The book was developed to assist cancer control organizations, health professionals, community groups, and others who are working to reduce the cancer burden throughout Texas. *For more information, contact Nancy Weiss, Cancer Registry Division, at (512) 458 7523, or e-mail nancy.weiss@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Texas Vaccines for Children program expands coverage of hepatitis A vaccine

The Texas Vaccines for Children (TVFC) program is expanding hepatitis A vaccine coverage to include all American-Indian and Native Alaskan children 18 years old and younger regardless of where they live or attend school. This expansion has come about as a result of a legal opinion from the Centers for Disease Control and Preventions' Office of General Counsel. Federal vaccine money covers this expansion. TVFC guidelines for influenza vaccine coverage for children at increased risk for complications of the disease are being updated to include the new recommendations from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, which must be implemented by March 2003.

Preparations are under way for statewide expansion of the TVFC quality-assurance contract. The contractor has begun conducting the CDC-required re-enrollment of providers, ending the nine-year burden of re-enrollment paperwork on providers. Depending on the amount of a federal grant award, the TVFC hopes to automate the quality-assurance paperwork in January 2003 by having the contractor post reports to a website. Central-office staff, public health regions, and local health departments will use passwords to gain access to data on the communities and providers they serve. *For more information, contact Jack Sims, Immunization Division, at (512) 458-7284, ext. 6215, or e-mail jack.sims@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Changes to ImmTrac rules proposed

Changes proposed to the ImmTrac program's rules were approved by the Texas Board of Health on Sept. 6 and were posted in the Sept. 20 issue of the *Texas Register*. Public comment will be accepted through Nov. 20, and a public hearing has been scheduled for Nov. 1. *For more information, contact David Scott, Immunization Division, at (512) 458-7284, ext. 6433, or e-mail david.scott@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Texas HIV Medication Program advisors told of budget needs

The Texas HIV Medication Program (THMP) held an emergency Texas HIV Medication Advisory Committee meeting on Aug. 16 to inform the committee of the status of the budget for the upcoming fiscal period. The THMP staff is working to implement program changes to stay within the established budget projections. *For more information, contact Linda Moore, HIV/STD Clinical Resources Division, at (512) 490-2505, or e-mail linda.moore@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Solutions sought to lack of access to HIV ambulatory medical care

TDH is working with others to seek short-term and long-term solutions to re-establishing medical care for people with HIV disease in the Abilene area after services there were interrupted. A meeting held by the HIV/STD Clinical Resources Division with the Tarrant County Health District HIV Program, the Abilene-Taylor County Public Health District, TDH regional staff, AIDS Resources of Rural Texas (ARRT), local physicians

and other clinicians, and others established that local physician providers are willing to receive additional training in HIV medical care through Texas Oklahoma AIDS Education Training Centers (AETC), although none are willing to see clients in the ARRT facility or in their private offices. An AETC/Parkland physician was to visit the facility in early September to decide whether he would provide medical care in Abilene over the short term while long-term solutions are sought. The HIV/STD Clinical Resources Division and Tarrant County have arranged for a physician and physician's assistant from the University of North Texas to attend the HIV clinic at ARRT once a week to provide medical care for the next four to six weeks. The HIV/STD Clinical Resources Division is working with the HIV/STD Health Resources Division and the chief of the Bureau of HIV and STD Prevention to resolve the lack of access to medical care. *For more information, contact Linda Moore, HIV/STD Clinical Resources Division, at (512) 490-2505, or e-mail linda.moore@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Clients at contracted HIV service organization exposed to TB; one dies

In reviewing the Early Intervention quarterly report from Clover House Assistance Services (CHAS) in Odessa, the HIV/STD Clinical Resources Division nurse consultant responsible for that area learned of two confirmed cases and one possible case of tuberculosis identified within the client population. One woman was treated and released from the San Antonio chest hospital, one man died, and a woman with a cough has not yet been tested. The nurse consultant worked with the CHAS program manager and TDH Tuberculosis Elimination Division staff to ensure that appropriate clinical follow-up for CHAS clients and staff. The CHAS registered nurse provided additional information on appropriate management of tuberculosis exposure for HIV-positive persons to forward to the attending physician and residents who provide medical care to the CHAS clients. The nurse consultant will review copies of the medical records of clients exposed to TB to determine whether any improvements in the clinic management of these clients could have been accomplished and to identify any additional training needs for clinic staff so that these needs can be met. *For more information, contact Linda Moore, HIV/STD Clinical Resources Division, at (512) 490-2505, or e-mail linda.moore@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Regional Updates

Public Health Region 1



Former hospital administrator hired as associate regional director

Stephen P. DeWoody, a retired U.S. Air Force officer and past administrator of both military and civilian hospitals, has been hired as Region 1's new associate regional director. He will oversee Community Health Services, Disease Control and Prevention, Health Planning, Risk Communication and Public Information, and Information Technology as it relates to public health preparedness activities. Most recently, DeWoody has served as executive director of South Plains Health Provider and was responsible for the management of six health centers throughout the Texas Panhandle. He holds an M.A. in Human Resources Management from Pepperdine University and an M.S. in Health Care Administration from Trinity University in San Antonio. *For more information, contact Nick Curry at (806) 767-0479, or e-mail nick.curry@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Animal skulls help dental society leaders teach kids about dental health

Leaders from the South Plains District Dental Society recently assisted with an oral health education presentation conducted by oral health staff members from Region 1. The “By the Roots” presentation emphasizes hands-on learning about the different kinds of teeth and how to take care of them. It features a number of different visual aids, including various animal skulls, to show children why different animals need different teeth. The dental society members helped demonstrate good brushing and flossing techniques and helped show off a number of the skulls. *For more information, contact Dale Drennan at (806) 767-0422, or e-mail dale.drennan@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 2 and 3



Year sees 16 percent drop in animal rabies cases

The Zoonosis Control Program at Region 2/3 has reported 305 cases of animal rabies for the year as of Sept. 25, a 16 percent reduction from the 363 cases reported at this same time last year. The vast majority of these cases continue to be skunks or animals that are infected with the south-central skunk rabies variant. *For more information, contact Jan Buck at (817) 264-4920, or e-mail jan.buck@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Zoonosis Control veterinarian transfers out

The veterinarian in the Zoonosis Control Program at Region 2/3 has departed. The employee transferred to Region 1, accepting a bioterrorism position in its Canyon office. *For more information, contact Jan Buck at (817) 264-4920, or e-mail jan.buck@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 4 and 5 North



Texas A&M University School of Rural Public Health

Region 4/5 North staff met with Dr. Barbara Quiram and other representatives of the Texas A&M University School of Rural Public Health on Sept. 26 to begin developing a plan for rural preparedness planning and training in three of the region’s southern counties: Houston, Trinity, and San Jacinto. The region is partnering with the university to enhance public preparedness and to develop a model for other rural counties. *For more information, contact Paul McGaha at (903) 533-5230, or e-mail paul.mcgaha@tdh.state.tx.us.*



WIC celebrates World Breastfeeding Month in four counties

The Region 6/5S WIC Program celebrated World Breastfeeding Month with five Breastfeeding Day celebrations in Waller, Austin, Colorado and Liberty counties. The Austin County Judge, Carolyn Bilski, spoke to WIC mothers about her experiences with breastfeeding her own child. Proclamations were sent by mayors of Sealy, Cleveland, and Katy declaring the day of the celebration World Breastfeeding Day for their respective cities. Volunteers who make baby quilts, toys, and clothes were honored at these celebrations; these baby items are given to moms as an incentive to breastfeed their babies. *For more information, contact Veronica Brown at (713) 767-3481, or e-mail veronica.brown@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Inspectors ensure used bedding gets germicidal treatment before being sold

Region 6/5S Product Safety Program staff, with assistance from Central Office staff, investigated 12 retailers in the Houston area for compliance with Texas bedding regulations in response to several complaints that mattress retailers, renovators, thrift shops, and flea markets were selling used mattresses advertised as new. Several establishments were found to be retailing used bedding that had not been germicidally treated. The untreated mattresses were removed from sale and detained until the correct procedures for germicidal treatment were implemented. Subsequent reviews by inspectors aided retailers in complying with all bedding regulations. *For more information, contact Rex Mann at (713) 767-3250, or e-mail rex.mann@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Students learn about healthy eating from Public Health Nutrition staff, others

Several Region 6/5S programs including Public Health Nutrition, Manufactured Foods, Nursing, Vision and Hearing, Public Health Promotion, Cancer Registry, and Texas Health Steps collaborated with the Greater Houston Nutrition Coalition recently to recognize Food Safety Month and National 5-A-Day Week. The Greater Houston Nutrition Coalition is a partnership of 19 area agencies. Lessons and activities conducted at Houston area schools for about 820 students included poster contests, tasting healthy snacks, and visits with characters costumed as fruits and vegetables. *For more information, contact Dianne Gertson at (713) 767-3483, or e-mail dianne.gertson@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 7



Bastrop County to study creation of public health department

The Bastrop County Citizen's Advisory Board of Health presented a public health report to the Commissioner's Court in September recommending a feasibility study to explore the creation of a public health department for Bastrop County, which was unanimously supported by the commissioners. Region 7 and Bastrop County first entered into a Memorandum of Understanding to create a local health unit in 1999. The Commissioner's Court appointed a citizen's advisory board and has set public health priorities based on Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance data and input from citizens. Regional staff are implementing a community health improvement plan that has been

approved by the advisory board. *For more information, contact Lisa McKamie at (254) 778-6744, or e-mail lisa.mckamie@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Lectures held on rabies, West Nile virus

At the request of the Milam County Health Department, the Region 7 Zoonosis Control Program's veterinarian presented a lecture Sept. 5 on the West Nile virus at Fair Park in Rockdale. About 20 citizens and municipal workers attended. On Sept. 25, the veterinarian presented a rabies-prevention lecture to first- and second-year physicians working in the Family Medicine Residency Program in Bryan. The residents received information on rabies transmission, rabies risks in Texas, post-exposure prophylaxis, and the role of animal control in rabies prevention. *For more information, contact Beverlee E. Nix at (254) 778-6744, ext. 2451, or e-mail beverlee.nix@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Parental input useful in implementing CATCH in Bryan elementary schools

Region 7 has been partnering with the Bryan Independent School District, Brazos County Health Department, and other community agencies to implement CATCH (Coordinated Approach to Child Health) in the district's 14 elementary-school campuses. Discussion groups were conducted in June to gather information from parents about their ideas and concerns pertaining to healthy eating and physical and recreational activities, how parents define overweight and obesity, and what communication sources parents use and trust for health information.

It was found that written communication to parents should be short and simple. Most of the working parents face challenges in consistently offering healthy meals to their children and want fast and easy meals to prepare. The largest perceived barriers to increased levels of physical activity are cultural factors that promote inactivity and concerns about children's safety. The information gathered will be used to develop CATCH strategies during the school year. *For more information, contact Robin Wiatrek at (254) 778-6744, or e-mail robin.wiatrek@tdh.state.tx.us.*

Public Health Region 9 and 10



Discussions under way on EPA survey for lead, arsenic in soil

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has mailed 400 more letters to El Paso residents whose soil was tested for lead and arsenic during the summer. Working with the EPA, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, and the El Paso City-County Health and Environmental District, TDH Region 9/10 staff continue to meet with community organizations and neighborhood residents to discuss the EPA survey and its results. *For more information, contact Jim Duran at (915) 834-7711, or e-mail jim.duran@tdh.state.tx.us.*



Strategic planning aims to improve communication, employee morale

Since December 2000 and partly in response to the results of the Survey of Organizational Excellence conducted in 2000, Region 9/10 has conducted a series of regional meetings to develop and implement a regional strategic plan. Eight groups are working on a variety of projects to improve communication with local officials and

communities, enhance employee morale, and improve communication within the region. For more information, contact Art Alvarado at (915) 834-7710, or e-mail art.alvarado@tdh.state.tx.us.



Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant public hearing held

Region 9/10 held a Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant public hearing on Sept. 10. Four stakeholders attended; none provided written or verbal testimony. For more information, contact Bea Martinez at (915) 834-7746, or e-mail beatrice.martinez@tdh.state.tx.us.

Public Health Region 11



Operation Lone Star 2002 brings almost \$1 million in services to colonias

Two elementary schools in Hidalgo County and one in Cameron County were the sites for Operation Lone Star 2002, held from July 29 to Aug. 8. Funded by Innovative Readiness Training of the Department of Defense, Operation Lone Star is a win-win arrangement, letting medically under-served colonia residents receive medical services at no cost while letting military personnel practice their mobilization and medical skills. This year, medical services were provided to 5,111 people, dental services to 1,073, and diabetes screens to 2,686. Total monetary value for services provided was \$916,161.

Military partners were the U.S. Navy Reserve, the Texas Air National Guard, the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, and the Texas Army National Guard. Civilian partners were TDH Region 11, Texas A&M University-South Texas Center, the Cameron County Health Department, Cameron County, Office of Secretary of State, the Hidalgo County Health Department, the Hidalgo WIC Program, the National Kidney Foundation, TSTC dental hygienists, Dentists Who Care, local independent school districts, and the San Antonio College of Dental and Medical Assistants. For more information, contact Ramiro Gonzales at (956) 423-0130, ext. 637, or e-mail ramiro.gonzales@tdh.state.tx.us.



Agreement signed at Los Dos Laredos Binational Health Council meeting

The Los Dos Laredos Binational Health Council of the U.S.-Mexico Border Health Association held its fourth annual meeting Sept. 18-19. The event had grown from a meeting of Region 11 staff with officials from the Mexican border states of Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon, where it was decided to invite health officials from the entire Texas border and all four neighboring Mexican states. For the past five years, Region 11 has actively sought a major project to improve communications with Mexico, and this year's meeting achieved the signing of an agreement by all border secretaries of health. For more information, contact Brian Smith at (956) 423-0130, or e-mail brian.smith@tdh.state.tx.us.



Hispanic Health Forum looks at environmental health

At the request of Rep. Solomon Ortiz, the Region 11 director attended a Hispanic Health Forum. The forum, held Aug. 15-17, was conducted by the National Hispanic Medical Association/Congressional Hispanic Council. The regional director participated in the writing of official recommendations for the border and environmental health which were presented to the council. For more information, contact Brian Smith at (956) 423-0130, or e-mail brian.smith@tdh.state.tx.us.



Creation of perinatal health advisory committee under consideration

TDH staff with the Perinatal System recently updated stakeholders in perinatal health about consideration by Region 11 to developing a regional perinatal health advisory committee. To start, information would be exchanged among local public health nurses, neonatologists, and other community professionals through an e-mail distribution list. Three working subgroups—prevention and prenatal care, delivery, and tertiary care—are being considered. *For more information, contact Cecilia G. Garza at (956) 423-0130, or e-mail cecilia.garza@tdh.state.tx.us.*